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PARTNERSHIP WITH PESTS

How to create an excellent sustainability program

By Karen Price

At many universities, including Seattle University, sustainability initiatives with a high degree of excellence start with a passionate staff, faculty or students. Your university doesn't have to be located on the U.S. West Coast—known for cultivating innovation and governmental policies that protect the environment—to have an excellent sustainability program. No matter the location of your Jesuit institution, there are things you can do to move your school further along the path to sustainability. Take for instance the journey that Seattle University traveled on.

The roots of SU's sustainability movement were planted in 1981. The new head of the grounds department, Ciscoe Morris, inherited a severe aphid infestation on campus caused by spraying the trees with a highly toxic pesticide. This non-selective spraying killed both good and bad bugs and resulted in an out-of-control aphid population. Morris wanted to figure out a way to develop a balance of nature on campus where there would be enough beneficial insects to help keep the bad ones in check. Having just taken an integrated pest management course, which taught him how to manage pests in partnership with nature, Morris proposed to the vice-president that he release lacewings—a "good" bug—to eat the aphids. Initially, the idea was met with skepticism—introducing more bugs to address a growing bug problem.

After Morris enlisted the enthusiastic support of the student government and faculty members, the vice president agreed on the condition that if it failed, he'd either have to continue spraying with a pesticide or lose his job. The lacewings successfully ate the aphids until a few remained. This experiment by Morris, a staff member who was passionate about protecting the environment and willing to stick his neck out by trying something new, epitomizes the culture within the facilities department. Within five years, all herbicides and pesticides were removed from campus.

Expanding sustainability out of facilities and into co-curricular education, academics and other departments' daily operations is the next step toward moving along the path to sustainability. This often requires sustainability champions at the highest levels of a university's administration. In Seattle University's case it has been the senior vice president, the vice president for business and finance, and the associate vice president of facilities. Their support created a sustainability coordinator position, an office for sustainability and a campus sustainability committee to involve students and faculty in identifying and advocating for new sustainability initiatives. Universities that have an excellent sustainability program typically employ one of these strategies to coordinate campus-wide efforts.

How to sign on to sustainability

Another thing a university can do to develop and support a sustainability program is to sign the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. Presidents signing this commitment pledge to eliminate their campuses' net greenhouse gas emissions in a reasonable period of time as determined by each institution. This involves setting up a committee to guide the process, tracking greenhouse gas emissions, creating and implementing a climate action plan and taking tangible steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while the more comprehensive plan is being developed. It also involves integrating sustainability into the curriculum and making it part of the educational experience. To date, 674 college and university presidents have signed including: Creighton University, Fairfield University, Gonzaga University Loyola

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Marymount University, Loyola University New Orleans, Saint Peter's College, Santa Clara University, Seattle University, and Xavier University.

At Fairfield University David Frassinelli, associate vice president for facilities management says, "Signing the President's Commitment was a significant step ... The green movement was alive with faculty and student groups actively pursuing their initiatives. The President's Commitment with its requirement for the creation of a campus sustainability committee that involved faculty, staff and students created a method to coordinate the disparate efforts and streamline the process. Case in point, one group wanted to create an organic garden on campus. By bringing it to the committee, the location was determined quickly, grounds crews built fences and provided soils. The labor to plant and manage was provided by faculty and students."

While improving the environmental stewardship of a university's operations reduces operating costs and green house gas emissions, the impact of educating the next generation of leaders about climate change and how to live sustainably will be many times more effective. It will be the mark of a genuinely excellent Jesuit education for the 21st century. Next is integrating sustainability into the curriculum.

Many educators do not see a connection between learning how to improve the lives of those in need within one's vocation and learning about sustainability. This is because most people think of recycling when they hear the word sustainability. Or they want to say 'environmental sustainability' which only focuses attention on one societal problem. Sustainability is a framework for making decisions that value human, environmental and economic needs as a whole system. The concept of sustainability is often shown as a Venn diagram where the overlapping circles of social equity, environment, and economy creates sustainability in the middle.

Networks of interdependence

Sustainability has been defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. What does that mean? For a campus building it would be a building that regenerates nature, improves the lives of tenants and the lives of those in need within community, and is affordable to operate for many decades. What might that look like? A green roof regenerates nature by providing the foundation for an ecosystem to emerge within an urban environment.

Windows that open, views to nature and daylight make for happy and healthy students, faculty and staff. A fruit and vegetable garden run by students brings the harvest to the local food bank. Designing a building that creates its own energy using renewable resources protects the university from having to increase tuition to pay the utility bill. All these sustainable building features are opportunities for student learning during the planning, implementation and ongoing maintenance and evaluation.

The huge problems facing us today—climate change, overpopulation, species extinction, peak oil, terrorism, a weak economy—are a crisis of perception derived from the fact that the world is now globally connected and our worldview has-

n't changed to keep up with it. The solutions to these problems require a radical shift in perception, thinking and values that acknowledges all living beings as members of ecological communities bound together in a network of interdependencies. The next level for a university to have an excellent sustainability program is for college students to graduate with a deep understanding of caring for creation within their vocation. ■

